

Iowa Joint Operator Certification and Training Coordination Committee

Friday, September 15, 2006 – IAMU Office, Ankeny, Iowa

Meeting Minutes

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Chair Jon Martens at 10:00 a.m.

Present were:

• Dale Acheson, IAWWA	• Brad Robbins, IRWA
• Alan Borden, IAWWA	• Harris Seidel, IWPCA
• Jane Enfield, IDNR	• Laurie Sharp, IDNR
• Rhonda Guy, IRWA	• Jill Soenen, IAMU
• Kirk Kemper, IAMU	• Mike Wildung, IRWA
• Jon Martens, IAWWA	• Joe Zervas, IDNR
• Jim McElvogue, IWPCA	

Visitors: Steve Moehlmann, ACEOPS
Jean Merkle, Indian Hills Community College

2. Adoption of Agenda

Moved by Alan Borden, seconded by Kirk Kemper, to adopt the agenda as distributed by e-mail a week earlier. Motion carried.

[NOTE: An agenda can be obtained from any Joint Committee member within the three days preceding a meeting of the Joint Committee.]

3. Approval of July 21, 2006 Minutes

Moved by Mike Wildung, seconded by Jill Soenen, to approve the minutes as distributed. Motion carried.

4. Public Comment

Steve Moehlmann introduced his guest, Jean Merkle, Coordinator, Iowa Biodevelopment for the Iowa Bioprocess Training Center at Eddyville which presents training in both water and wastewater.

5. Unfinished Business/Assignments

a. Press Release

Rhonda Guy distributed draft copies of a press release she has prepared at the request of the Joint Committee. It was judged to be a good start, with some further work needed. Rhonda is also preparing a longer article describing what the Joint Committee is and does, aimed at newsletters and similar opportunities.

b. McElvogue-Hoffert Amendment

Laurie Sharp reported that this amendment is on track and on schedule as outlined in the July minutes.

c. NTK Progress Report

This project is currently in limbo, but staff will soon return to it with the help of a consultant.

d. Operation by Affidavit (2005 Strategic Plan Issue No. II)

On August 21, 2006, a letter from Laurie Sharp was sent to all certified operators, describing the need for affidavit operators and encouraging those interested in working on a guidance document to contact Laurie. Jon Martens is the subcommittee chair for development of this guidance document. He reported that they have already had responses from six operators and two field office staff and interest from others.

e. Relevant Training for Grade A Operators (2005 Strategic Plan Issue No. IV)

Subcommittee chair Brad Robbins will soon be organizing a subcommittee to tackle this assignment.

f. Facilities Classification (2005 Strategic Plan Issue No. VII)

An e-mail from subcommittee co-chair Jim Stricker reported that progress is being made on organizing this subcommittee.

g. Water Distribution (2005 Strategic Plan Issue No. III)

This recent mini-history of WD certification was distributed.

1996	SDWA Re-authorization
1997	August – Active certificates: WT: 1,828; WD: 291
1999	EPA Final Guidelines on Operator Certification. The thrust of the Guidelines was that <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Distribution is important and• WD certification is to be separate but equal with WT certification. <i>Note that the phrase "separate but equal" is an EPA term; it was not coined locally.</i>
2000	IDNR staff worked on new Rules; there were many proposals, many changes.
2001	The new Rules adopted provided that: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- WT operators could receive WD certification on request in the form of a PWS certificate valid for both. No experience or exam required.- "For purposes of renewal, all renewal fees and CEU requirements (for a PWS certificate) shall be applied as one certification." Two for one.- The 25:75 rule, which meant that for Grades I and II the WT certificate could now be renewed with 0.75 CEU every two years, and the WD certificate could now be renewed with 0.25 CEU every two years.
2002	September – Active certificates: WT: 1,929; WD: 2,101

The understanding or assumption was that

- the above provisions applied only to those "grandfathered" into WD certification in 2001, and
- all new entries since 2001 would be on a separate track, required to earn 1 CEU every two years for renewal of each certificate.

That assumption was wrong. There is no separate track for new entries.

End of mini-history. Beginning of discussion by the Joint Committee.

How did this misunderstanding happen? Jon Martens read excerpts from minutes of several Joint Committee meetings.

January 14, 2000	Excerpt from a motion e-mailed to members: "...certified operators must earn 1 CEU, or 10 contact hours, for each Grade I or II certification classification held...." <i>This part of the motion expressed the consensus of the committee at that time, but the complete motion was very complex and did not pass.</i>
August 16, 2000	"(an IDNR staff person) stated that those coming into the field will not enter the combined WT/WD (PWS) track. Instead, if they want or need both certificates, they will be required to earn and maintain both certifications separately. We understand this to be by separate exam fees and renewal requirements."
September 21, 2001	"It was noted that this exercise of issuing WD conversion certificates was a one-time event done under the stress of limited time to meet deadlines for adoption of the new Rules. However, this is now behind us. For the future, it was suggested that we need to focus our time and energy on planning a more realistic WD certification program to serve those actually working in and seeking to advance in

	water distribution."
November 15, 2002	(re the 25:75 rule) "...rather than flexibility, this should instead be recognized as a dilution of the renewal requirement from 1.0 CEU to 0.75...for Grades I and II ...WT."
January 10, 2003	(an IDNR staff person) "Consider again the purpose of the CEU requirement. The IDNR holds to the position that operators should at least meet the minimum requirements (1.0 or 2.0 CEUs) for renewal in any classification."

Laurie Sharp commented that until the July 2006 meeting, current certification staff (Laurie and team) had never heard of the concept or proposal for a separate track for new entries. Since then, IDNR staff have researched the issue. Current Rules clearly do not allow for two tracks. Further, staff feel that administering two separate tracks, one for "grandfathers" and one for new entries, would be a record-keeping nightmare. If the Rules are changed to require 1 CEU for renewal of Grades I and II certification in each classification (and 2.0 CEUs for III and IV), this will have to apply to everybody—all or none. As a conversational proposal, consideration could be given to making such a change effective for the 2009-11 renewal cycle. This would give operators more than two years to understand and prepare for the change.

In hindsight, one may ask how we got ourselves into this situation. In 2000, Iowa (along with all the other states) was scrambling to respond to the EPA Guidelines and put in place a WD certification program. Time was limited. Meeting the deadline meant retaining primacy over the certification program. Iowa did retain primacy. However, Iowa got away with a big one. No objective observer would claim we meet the "separate but equal" criterion. (We will not use the ugly word "backsliding" since that is expressly prohibited in the Guidelines.)

Comment from a Joint Committee member: This may all be very interesting, but the point is where do we go from here? The following is an attempt to summarize the ensuing discussion by topics.

EPA's Position. Rhonda Guy asked if EPA is pushing this. We are not aware of any EPA pressure at this time, but several committee members expressed the belief that EPA probably could and would follow through on "separate but equal" certification in the near future.

Two Certificates? If the Rules are changed to require 1 CEU for each classification, would this result in a separate certificate for WD and one for WT? Actually, there may be merit in this. It would help emphasize to the towns that these are two disciplines and training is needed for competence in both.

Flexibility. Dale Acheson stressed the value of continuing to allow flexibility in the CEU requirement; that is, to allow (for example) 25 percent of the training requirement for WD to be earned in WT topics and vice versa. There was strong agreement that this was important in developing broader knowledge of the water industry rather than pigeon-holing operators into just one discipline.

Strategic Plan Issue No. III. Keep in mind that this was/is a major goal of our 2005 Strategic Plan, approved by all members of the Joint Committee, and widely distributed. (no comment about how widely read)

Drop-Outs. Operators may decide to drop one or the other classification if required to earn CEUs for renewal of each one. This speaks for itself; apparently, that operator has no need for both certificates.

Purpose. Keep in mind the basic purpose here. Distribution IS important. Requirements are increasing. The goal should be more training, better performance, higher quality water reaching the consumer.

Where to Go from Here

- Such a change cannot be made suddenly. At best, this will be a hard sell in some quarters.
- But we will probably have to do this in the near future.
- We should form a committee and start.
- No, we should not form a committee and start.
- If we do form a committee, we should consider including wastewater representatives, looking toward the parallel situation with WWC certification, instead of waiting until this is on top of us.
- First, plant the seeds; then allow time for discussion.

Chair's Closure. Chair Jon Martens suggested that we give this some serious thought, then consider at the November meeting whether or not to appoint a committee and what its charge might be.

6. New Business

None.

7. Representative Comments

a. IDNR

Laurie Sharp reported that Grade III and IV exams will be going on line soon, and at that point certification exams for ALL grades of ALL classifications will be available on line. Congrats on a landmark achievement!

Laurie mentioned the 8/21 Affidavit letter and described further how IDNR expects to select from those who respond and then work with them on the subcommittee.

Joe Zerfas reported that the Issuing Agency Agreement with IAWA has been finalized.

b. IAMU

Jill Soenen noted the Water Leak Detection and Water Distribution Training Workshops to be held on the IAMU campus on September 27 and 28, respectively. She also announced six Grade I Water Treatment Exam Workshops scheduled as follows:

Independence – October 11	Atlantic – October 19
Coralville – October 12	Storm Lake – October 25
Ankeny (IAMU) – October 17	Mason City – November 1

Note: This title could be misinterpreted; the course content is actually basic water treatment training, not exam prep, and does qualify for CEUs. Exam prep sessions do not qualify for CEUs.

c. IAWWA

Dale Acheson reminded those present of the Iowa Section Annual Conference to be held in Council Bluffs October 3-5.

d. IRWA

Brad Robbins announced that IRWA's Fall Conferences will be held at Okoboji September 18 and 19 and at Dubuque October 9 and 10.

Grade A Disinfection and Sampling nighttime classes are scheduled as follows:

DeWitt – October 17	Carroll – October 31
Coralville – October 18	Algona – November 1
Mt. Vernon – October 19	Postville – December 5

Small System Record-keeping and Sampling training is scheduled as follows:

Marshalltown – October 24

Tipton – October 25

Guthrie Center – November 14

Sloan – November 16

Independence – December 5

Clear Lake – December 7

e. ISU

No representative present.

f. IWPCA

Jim McElvogue reported that the Joint Fall Short Course in West Des Moines was very successful with an attendance of about 250. The meeting rooms were crowded.

g. KCC

No representative present.

8. Assignments

Rhonda Guy – E-mail working copies of press release and longer descriptive article to all committee members for their perusal and input

Staff – Progress report on the McElvogue-Hoffert amendment

Staff – NTK progress report

Jon Martens – Affidavit subcommittee progress report

Brad Robbins – Grade A training subcommittee progress report

Jim Stricker/Jim Utter – Facilities classification subcommittee progress report

All – Do some deep thinking and bring your suggestions on WD.

9. Next Meeting

Friday, November 17, 2006, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. at the IAMU office in Ankeny.

10. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn was made by Dale Acheson; seconded by Jim McElvogue; motion carried. The Joint Committee adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

Harris F. Seidel, Secretary